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Sexton, George.
History's Testimony to
Christ.

HISTORY'S TESTIMONY TO CHRIST:

A DISCOURSE

PREACHED IN

ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH, CLAPHAM, ENGLAND,

ON CHRISTMAS MORNING, 1877,

BY THE

REV. GEORGE SEXTON, M.A., M.D., LL.D.,

Honorary Professor of Natural Science in the Galileo-Academy, Naples;

Honorary and Corresponding Fellow of the Italian Society of Science;

Honorary Member of L'Accademia dei Quiriti, Rome;

Member of the Victoria Institute; Philosophical Society of Great Britain;

&c., &c., &c.

NEW AND REVISED EDITION.

But foremost of all studies, let me not
Forget to bid thee learn Christ's faith by heart.
Study its truths, and practise its behests:
They are the purest, sweetest, peacefullest,
Of all immortal reasons or records:
They will be with thee when all else have gone.
Mind, body, passion, all wear out—not faith
Nor truth."—*Baileij's Pictus.*

TORONTO, CANADA:

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HISTORY'S TESTIMONY TO CHRIST.

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“When the fulness of time was come God sent forth His Son.”—GAL. iv. 4.

EIGHTEEN hundred years ago there took place in Judea the most momentous event that has ever happened in the history of the world. The influence that it has exercised over all the ages since is confessedly far greater than that which has arisen from all other events put together. The life and death of Jesus Christ far eclipse all other lives and deaths combined that the world has ever seen. The glorious news communicated to the shepherds, “Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord,”* transcends every other message that humanity has received from the creation up to now. Lecky, the Historian of Rationalism, does not hesitate to say: “It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character, which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love, and has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, temperaments, and conditions; has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice, and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to soften and regenerate mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and all the exhortations of moralists.”† This from a sceptic cannot be looked upon as an exaggeration of the influence exercised over the world by the teaching and example of Christ. Such a man would hardly be likely to err in that direction; yet, what explanation he can give of

* Luke ii. 11.

† Hist. Europ. Morals, ii. p. 8.

the fact as it presents itself to his mind it is difficult to imagine. The great German anti-Christian author, Strauss, remarks: "He (Christ) will remain to all of us the more surely, the less anxiously we cling to doctrines and opinions that might tempt our reason to forsake Him. But if Christ remains to us, and if He remains to us as the highest we know, and are capable of imagining within the sphere of religion, as the person without whose presence in the mind no perfect piety is possible—we may fairly say that in Him do we still possess the sum and substance of the Christian faith" * The author of the work called "Supernatural Religion," perhaps the ablest sceptical book of modern times, observes: "Whilst all previous systems had merely sought to purify the stream, it (Christ's Teaching) demanded the purification of the fountain. It placed the evil thought on a par with the evil action. Such morality, based upon the intelligent and earnest acceptance of Divine law and perfect recognition of the brotherhood of man, is the highest conceivable of humanity, and although its power and influence must augment with increase of enlightenment, it is itself beyond development, consisting as it does of principles unlimited in their range and inexhaustible in their application." † Says Greg—also a sceptic, bear in mind—"The religion of Jesus contains more truth, purer truth, higher truth, stronger truth than has ever yet been given to man. Much of His teaching I unhesitatingly receive as, to the best of my judgment, unimprovable and unsurpassable—fitted, if obeyed, to make earth a Paradise indeed, and man only a little lower than the angels." ‡ The testimony of another unbeliever—Renan—on this subject is not less remarkable. Speaking of Jesus, he says: "He has created the heaven of pure souls, where is found what we ask for in vain on earth, the perfect nobility of the children of God, absolute purity, the total removal of the stains of the world; in fine, liberty, which society excludes as an impossibility, and which exists in all its amplitude in the domain of thought. The great Master of those who take refuge in this ideal kingdom of God is still Jesus. He was the first to proclaim the royalty of the mind, the first to say, at least by His actions, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' The foundation of true religion is indeed His work, after

* Soliloquies, p. 67.

† Sup. Rel. ii. p. 67.

‡ Creed of Christendom, p. 224.

Him all that remains is to develop it, and render it fruitful. Christianity has thus become almost a synonym of religion. All that is done outside this great and good Christian tradition is barren."* And again, "whatever may be the transformation of dogma, Jesus will ever be the Creator of the pure spirit of religion. The Sermon on the Mount will never be surpassed."† Judge from these extracts—and they could be considerably multiplied—how momentous was that birth which we to-day celebrate. The world loves to commemorate the birth of men of transcendent genius, whose mighty thoughts live in our literature, our science, and our art; and to whom we are indebted for sublime poems, great discoveries, or masterpieces of artistic workmanship. And we agree with the practice. So, too, we delight to honor the philosopher, the moralist, the philanthropist, the traveller, and the statesman. But what are all these compared to Him who, if the teaching of the New Testament be true, was God incarnate in Human Form, the brightness of the Father's Glory, and the express image of His Person,‡ and whose mission to earth had in view the bridging of the chasm between man and God, the salvation of mankind, and the redemption of the human race. Who amongst us can fathom the depth of that angelic song shouted forth by the Hosts of Heaven on the first Christmas morning—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men?"§ Eighteen centuries have rolled away since that time, but the song is ever new and its glorious effects are still felt upon the world.

There was a peculiar fitness in the time at which Christ came, as, in fact, there is in all God's arrangements. What the scientist calls adaptation in the physical world—and which is really design—obtains in the moral region of God's Providence likewise. God is as manifest in history as in nature. Not a sparrow can fall without His knowledge, and no event can occur without His permission.

"To Him no high, no low, no great, no small,
He fills, He bounds, connects, and equals all."||

Christ came in the Fulness of Time, that is, at the most appropriate period in the world's history. He is the Spiritual Sun, and

* Life of Jesus, p. 303. † *Ibid.*, p. 304. ‡ Heb. i. 3. § Luke ii. 14. || Pope.

His beams radiate in all directions. A long line of prophecies respecting Him stretch backwards to the dawn of humanity, and His influence on mankind in the future extends through eternity. His life on earth is the pivot on which all the events in the world turn. Everything else must be looked at in its light. Jesus Christ is the key that unlocks not simply all the mysteries of man, but all the mysteries of the universe. The great riddle of existence can only be read by the light that Christ's life and death throw upon it; and God's purpose can only be learned by the Incarnation. God's Power, Wisdom, and Majesty may be beheld in stars and suns, and trees and flowers; but his Infinite love can be seen nowhere to perfection but in the face of Christ.

Let us notice three great classes of facts:

1. The General Expectation of the People when Christ came.
2. The Moral Condition of the World at the time.
3. The Results that followed the Advent.

I. THE GENERAL EXPECTATION OF THE PEOPLE WHEN CHRIST CAME.

A great number of predictions had been put forth by the Prophets of the old Dispensation respecting the Messiah who was to come, and it seemed clear, from some of these, that He would make His appearance whilst the second temple was standing. At all events, the impression that the time for His coming approached had been deepening for some long period, until it culminated in the reign of Herod. Amongst the Jews, so prevalent was the idea at that time that the coming of Messiah was at hand, that every birth was looked forward to with a certain amount of anxiety, and every Hebrew mother hoped that she might be the favoured individual of whom the coming Deliverer should be born. Josephus informs us that one of the causes which stimulated the Jews to revolt against the Roman rule was "an ambiguous oracle, found likewise in the sacred writings, that about that time some one from their country should obtain the empire of the world."* True, Josephus refers this to Vespasian, which is monstrously absurd, and, in all probability, put forward with the view of pleasing that monarch. Suetonius observes: "There had been for a long time all over the East a

* Jos. de Bell, Lib. vi., cap. 5, § 4.

notion, formerly believed that it was in the book of the fates, that some one from Judea was destined about that time to obtain the empire of the world.”* Tacitus, relating the calamities of the Jews which preceded the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, says: “The mass of the people entertained a strong persuasion that it was mentioned in the ancient writings of the priests that at that very time the East should prevail, and some one from Judea obtain the empire of the world. Which ambiguities,” he goes on to say, “predicted Vespasian and Titus. But the common people, according to the usual influence of human passions, having once appropriated to themselves this destined greatness, could not be brought to understand the true meaning by all their adversities.”† At all events the predictions could not refer to a Roman Emperor, unless such an Emperor had been a Jew. It is, consequently, not very surprising that the people refused to listen to so absurd an application of their prophecies. These opinions respecting the speedy coming of the Messiah seem to be borne out by the New Testament. Hence the anxiety of Herod on hearing of the birth of Christ, and the persecution which followed; hence, also, the visit of the Magi; and the thronging of the people to John, to enquire if he were the Messiah who was to come.

The Samaritan woman, who belonged to a different and by no means friendly nation, was also expecting the Messiah to come, as she informed the Lord in the conversation that she had with Him. And it is important to notice that this is one of the instances in which He directly claimed to be that Messiah. The Jews very frequently demanded of our Lord a sign from heaven in proof of His Messiahship, and would on several occasions, when they saw an extraordinary display of His power, have taken Him by force to make Him a King. His spiritual kingdom they understood not, nor the nature of that reign which should some day extend from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the end of the earth. “The Desire of all Nations”‡ was to come in that Messiah; but the Jews only looked for a chieftain who should lead them on to victory and conquest, and subjugate all their enemies beneath a Hebrew yoke.

* Life of Vesp., cap. 4.

† Tacit. Hist., Lib. v., cap. 13.

‡ Haggai ii. 7.

II. THE STATE OF THE WORLD AT THE PERIOD WHEN CHRIST CAME.

It is impossible for us in a discourse of this kind to deal at length with the condition of the world at large when the advent took place, but we may refer briefly to the state of society in Judea and in the Roman Empire, as these were the parts of the world more immediately concerned.

1. *Judea.* As far as the Jews were concerned, the state of society amongst them was terrible. Tradition had made their law of none effect, and only ceremonial observances seem to have been cared for. The Hebrew Scriptures had been translated two centuries before into Greek, and were probably known to the entire civilised world. Jews had established themselves in every important city in the great empire of Rome. The religion of Judaism appears, therefore, to have accomplished its purpose, and to have little more left for it to do in the world. The corruption of the times was fearful. The Pharisees were steeped in hypocrisy, and the Sadducees in scepticism; and both in moral degradation. The priests were narrow-minded, bigoted, and intolerant, and the leading laymen recklessly vicious. The office of the high priest was purchased like any other commodity, and was terribly abused when once it had been secured. The servants of this functionary took away by violence the tithes of the priests, so that many of them perished for want of food. People were taught that so long as they brought money to the temple they might leave their aged parents to starve. Adultery, practised by means of unjust divorces, was terribly prevalent, and the polygamy of the time was scandalous. Even the rabbis were licentious in the extreme, and made no secret of the illicit gratification of their passions. Treachery, bitterness, discord, revenge, hatred and evil passions were tolerated, while an insane zeal for ceremonial observances, was cultivated. The moral condition of the people was at its lowest point. Read their own historian, Josephus, and you will find that his testimony corroborates that of St. Paul with regard to their depravity.

There was little left of this religion but its splendid history, but that was very brilliant. It had a grand prestige, a long line of

illustrious prophets, a law given by supernatural authority direct from God Himself amid the fire and smoke of Sinai. Two features were conspicuous in Judaism at this time—the moral depravity of the people and their inordinate zeal for the external forms of their religion.

2. *The Roman Empire.* Notice the condition of this vast domain when Christ came. Power and wealth had been accumulating for ages; the result was, as is too often the case, the people had become effeminate and—what was worse—terribly corrupt. The states were rotten to their hearts' core. A careful study of the age of Augustus will reveal to you the most shocking immorality, coupled with the blackest despair. Even the intellectual brilliancy of the period—and it was very great—was but the efflorescence of its corruption. The profligacy of the times was dreadful. All kinds of vice and obscenity prevailed. Read the accounts of the life of Tiberius, Pilate's master, as given by Tacitus and Suetonius, and you have a picture of foulness personified. His sensual gratifications were those of an incarnate devil. From the highest to the lowest the most fearful abominations were practised. Seneca thus describes his own time: "All is full of criminality and vice; indeed much more of these is committed than can be remedied by force. A monstrous contest of abandoned wickedness is carried on. The lust of sin increases daily; and shame is daily more and more extinguished. Discarding respect for all that is good and sacred, lust rushes on wherever it will. Vice no longer hides itself. It stalks forth before all eyes. So public has abandoned wickedness become, and so openly does it flame up in the minds of all, that innocence is no longer seldom, but has wholly ceased to exist." Crimes were indulged in without a blush in the open day, and in public places that could not even be named to-day before a general audience. In Greece the temples themselves were the scenes of unparalleled profligacy, and in Rome things were equally bad. The wisest men were without hope, and for the rest they gave themselves up to sensual gratification, and cared for nothing higher. Female virtue was laughed at, and even female modesty was extinct. The world was a wreck, and appeared to be literally in its death

struggle. Morality and religion had both disappeared. Mr. Matthew Arnold thus writes :—

“ On that hard Pagan world, disgust
And sated loathing fell :
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.
In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay,
He drove abroad in furious guise
Along the Appian way.
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his hair with flowers ;
No easier, nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours.”

Polytheism had failed, and Atheism was taking its place, so that the age was godless, as well as shamelessly base. The account given by St. Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans is no exaggeration of the state of things that existed. The one oasis in the desert was Stoicism, and that failed, not only to reach the common people, but even to influence its own expounders. Read Dr. Farrar's work, entitled “ Seekers After God ”—a book written as a sort of defence of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus—and you will see what admissions the Author is compelled to make respecting the imperfections of these men, who are often held up to-day by sceptics as patterns of virtue. Every one is familiar with the bitter irony in which Macaulay speaks of Seneca. “ The business of a philosopher, according to Seneca, was to declaim in praise of poverty with ten millions sterling out at usury, to meditate epigrammatic conceits about the evils of luxury in gardens which moved the envy of sovereigns, to rant about liberty while fawning on the insolent and pampered freedmen of a tyrant, to celebrate the divine beauty of virtue with the same pen with which he had just before written a defence of the murder of a mother by her son.” “ Seneca,” says Niebuhr, “ was an accomplished man of the world, who occupied himself very much with virtue, and may have considered himself to be an ancient Stoic. He certainly believed that he was a most ingenuous and virtuous philosopher ;

* Seneca de Ira, ii. 8.

but he acted on the principle that, as far as he himself was concerned, he could dispense with the laws of morality which he laid down for others, and that he might give way to his natural propensities." Epictetus himself, one of the leading Stoics, laments the failure of Stoicism, and advises the people to seek fellowship with Zeus. He exclaims in despair, "Show me a Stoic if you have one. Where? Or how should you? You can show indeed a thousand who repeat the Stoic reasonings. But do they repeat the Epicurean worse? Are they not just as perfect in the Peripatetic? Who, then, is a Stoic? As we call that a Phidian Statue which is formed according to the art of Phidias, so show me some one person formed according to the art which he professes. Show me one who is sick and happy, in danger and happy, dying and happy, exiled and happy, disgraced and happy. Show him to me, for, by Heaven, I long to see a Stoic. But you [will say you] have not one perfectly formed. Show me, then, one who is forming, and who is approaching towards the character. Do me this favor. Do not refuse an old man a sight which he has never yet seen."* He then goes on to deny that such a person exists. He is anxious, he says, to have a sight of a person who is not envious nor jealous, but desiring fellowship with Zeus. Alas! what Zeus. Belief in Zeus had died out, and there was no Zeus to cry to? Humanity sent forth a long, sad, and sickening wail, and philosophy was powerless to respond; and such religion as remained was incompetent to the task of bringing any kind of relief.

The Elder Pliny exclaims—and his words are typical of the state of mind of the greatest of the Romans—"The vanity of man, and his insatiable longing after existence, have led him to dream of a life after death. A being full of contradictions, he is the most wretched of creatures, since the other creatures have no wants transcending the bounds of their nature. Man is full of desires and wants, that reach to infinity, and can never be satisfied. His nature is a lie—uniting the greatest poverty with the greatest pride. Among those so great evils, the best thing God has bestowed on man is the power to take his own life." Even Marcus Aurelius—upon whom sceptics

* Works of Epictetus translated by Elizabeth Carter, 1768, i. pp. 225-6.

are in the habit of bestowing so much praise—recommended “retiring from life, if a man did not feel himself strong enough to maintain a certain moral elevation.”* Alas! what a fearful state of things does this portray. Suicide indeed was publicly advocated, and most extensively practised. In fact it was declared to be a courageous and virtuous act for a man to take his own life. Seneca pleaded for it, Cicero advocated it, and Brutus and Cassius in company with many others both defended and practised it. Plutarch praises Cato for having put an end to his life by his own hand.

To expose one’s newly-born infants, *i.e.*, to murder them, was permitted in most of the States of Greece and Rome. Even amongst the polite and highly-cultured Athenians, to abandon one’s offspring to perish of hunger, or to be destroyed by wild beasts, was regarded as an act in no way to be blamed. Says Hume—a man not likely to be prejudiced against the ancients—“This practice was very common, and is not spoken of by any author of those times with the horror it deserves, or scarcely even with disapprobation. Plutarch the humane, the good-natured Plutarch, mentions it as a merit in Attalus, king of Pergamus, that he murdered, or, if you will, exposed all his own children in order to leave his crown to the son of his brother Eumenius. It was Solon, the most celebrated of all the sages of Greece, that gave parents permission by law to kill their children.”†

As to purity there was none worth naming. The details of licentiousness are sickening in the extreme. Crimes which to-day even bad men shudder at, were regularly practised and defended by sages and moralists. Let those who desire to know more of the fearful abominations that prevailed in heathen times, read such books as Dr. Döllinger’s “The Gentile and the Jew,” Dr. Tholuck on “The Nature and Moral Influence of Heathenism,” etc. The sins of that time are loathsome even to mention, and I turn sick at heart when I think of their infernal character. The fearful and disgusting vice known by the name of *Paidæstia*—foulest of all the pollutions to which depraved human nature has degraded itself, was tolerated on all hands. Says Döllinger: “In the whole litera-

* Döllinger’s *The Gentile and the Jew*, ii. p. 284.

† Pop. of An. Nat.

ture of the ante-Christian period there is hardly a writer to be met with who has expressed himself in hostile terms as to it. In very truth the whole of society was infected with it, and people inhaled the pestilence with the air they breathed. It was glorified by poetry in all its forms." * But enough of this disgusting matter. Suffice it to say that the most civilized countries in the world were steeped to the neck in moral pollution. The intellectual systems of Socrates and of Aristotle had thoroughly failed, as had also Plato's passion for the ideal Good and the Beautiful. Schools of philosophy abounded, but they were powerless to operate on the human mind. It was an epoch of moral degradation and intellectual despair. Civilization, art, literature, commerce, political organization were all there, but they lacked the Promethean spark that alone could give them light and life ; hence the age was dark as Erebus, and every year the gloom deepened. This was the condition of the world when the angelic song went forth, carrying light and truth in its train, " Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

III. THE RESULTS THAT FLOWED FROM THE ADVENT OF CHRIST.

We have seen what was the condition of Judaism and of the Roman Empire at that time: now let us notice how these were influenced by Christ, for here it was that the first effects of His teaching were experienced.

Judaism could point backward to a splendid history dating from the time when Abraham—whom they were proud to call their father—relinquished the worship and the country of his ancestors in obedience to a command of the Most High, which command was coupled with glorious promises for his posterity, that even yet form the hope of Israel. They had enjoyed a theocracy, and had received their laws direct from heaven. The miraculous had been at one time with them an every-day affair, and their priesthood even yet claimed supernatural authority. What was the simple Christian faith to do against this imposing religion with its magnificent temple, its elaborate ritual, and its proud and insolent priest-

* The Gentile and the Jew, ii. p. 239.

hood? What did it do? "His blood be on us and on our children," they cried in reckless and blasphemous bravado, and in less than half a century afterwards the terrible wish was realized, the judgments of God fell like hail upon their land, their temple was razed to its foundations and their city reduced to ashes. From that time their whole race became despised, and persecuted, wandering over the earth with the curse of God upon them. Look at Judaism in the past, and compare its state then with its present position, in which it has remained for 1,800 years. As a religion it can hardly be said to exist. True it is that Jews meet once a week—not very regularly—to read prayers in a language which but few of them understand, and to listen to a lecture in the language of the country in which they assemble. But where is their temple? What has become of the altar and the sacrifices that were wont to be offered upon it? These have gone, and no Jewish Rabbi can tell you why. Ask the next Jew that you may happen to meet, and he will be dumb. Judaism without a temple, without an altar, the thing is a paradox. The passover is still kept, but there is no paschal lamb. What is the explanation of this? You shall find it in the epistle to the Hebrews—"Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me."* For long ages the priests had offered their daily sacrifices. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, forever sat down on the right hand of God."† There is the key that unlocks the mystery. There is the true solution of the problem. Why, to day the Jew does not even believe in a Messiah who is to come. This doctrine, which was the sole expectation of Israel for ages, the one golden thread that ran through their entire history; their comfort in affliction, their support in persecution, and the only foundation of their hopes when in exile or subject to a foreign yoke, they believe in no more. No Jewish Messiah is looked for to-day, and has not been for many a year. False Messiahs were as plentiful as blackberries once, but they come no more. When Barkokeba fell before the sword of Julius Severus, the reign of Judah ended, the hopes of the people

* Heb. x. v.

† v. 12.

disappeared, and Judaism as a great religion ceased to be.* “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the law-giver from between his feet until Shilo come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”† This was the prophecy uttered by Jacob hundreds of years before, and lo! its fulfilment. Shilo appeared and Judaism as such came to a close. No more important fact is to be met with in history than this one. It is related of a chaplain of Frederick William I. of Prussia, that having been requested to supply an argument for the truth of Christianity in the fewest words, he said, “The Jews, your Majesty.” And there was much force in the argument.

Then, as to the Roman Empire. The fearful evils, to which I have already referred, had to be fought against and conquered by the religion of Jesus Christ. Hence as soon as the truths of the new faith were proclaimed, the contest began, and for a time the conflict was a very terrible one. From the first burst of fiendish hatred and fiery persecution under Nero to the end of the third century the struggle was continued with unabated fury. Now, why did Paganism persecute Christianity? She never troubled herself with the speculations of philosophers, however wild and chimerical they might be. These she deemed beneath her notice, and so, however absurd and outrageous they might appear, they were left to their fate. But Christianity proclaimed a stern moral code, and made virtue an essential condition of human life; and hence the conflict with vice in high places was unavoidable. A new god in the Pantheon—or, for the matter of that, a dozen—would have made very little difference to the Romans. But these Christians, who not only worshipped a new God—Jesus Christ, the Crucified One—but who, to use the words of Archdeacon Farrar, “turned away with aversion from temples and statues; who refused to witness the games of the amphitheatre; who would die rather than fling into the altar flame a pinch of incense to the genius of the emperors; who declined even to wear a garland of flowers at the banquet, or pour a libation at the sacrifice; whose austere morality was a terrible reflection on the favorite sins which

* *Vide* Jahn, Heb. Commonwealth, Eng. translation, p. 196; Farrar's Witness of Hist. to Christ, p. 98.

† Gen. xlix. 10

had eaten like a spreading cancer into the very heart of the nation's life; these Christians, with their unpolished barbarism, their unphilosophical ignorance, their stolid endurance, their detestable purity, their intolerable meekness, kindled against themselves alike the philosophers whose pride they irritated, the priests whose gains they diminished, the mob whose indulgences they thwarted, the emperors whose policy they disturbed."* Yet, without a weapon of a warlike character, Christianity triumphed, overcame all opposition, and established herself upon the ruins of the great Roman Empire. The new religion put to silence the subtle sophistries of the philosophers, withstood the coarse and brutal opposition of the mob, and prospered, despite the fiery persecutions of succeeding emperors. Lucian, using a cold Atheistic sneer in the place of argument, thought, if not to refute the Christians, at least to make them appear ridiculous. Philostratus and Jamblicus endeavoured to bring contempt upon them by emulating their Gospels with stories of false miracles. Celsus attacked them with his powerful rhetoric. Porphyry and Hierocles used against them arguments replete with intellectual mysticism. All was in vain. A handful of poor untutored Christians, upon whom had been heaped every name of contempt that the Pagan imagination could invent—*stolidi, fatui, infausti, athei*—without education or intellectual culture, refuted every argument used against them by the force of the truth which they had on their side. They proclaimed the eternal love of God, and the rhetorical flourishes of their opponents became dwarfed in its presence. Stoicism, with its apathetic and hopeless creed, and Neo-Platonism, with its cold and cheerless Pantheism, had no chance against a faith based on the infinite love of God to man. Paganism had failed, and although desperate attempts were now made to revive it, coupled with rites more brutal and more infamous than any that had gone before—the disgusting taurobolium and criobolium—the efforts were in vain. Great Pan was dead, and no earthly power could resuscitate his wretched, festering corpse. As Paganism found itself incapable of grappling with Christianity by argument, it resorted to a persecution of a most fearful character. Nero drove through his gardens between lines of torches, each torch

* Witness of History to Christ, pp. 99-100.

being a Christian believer clothed in garments of pitch and then set on fire. But the virulence of Nero paled before the animosity of Decius and Diocletian,* under whose reigns the persecutions were carried on with unheard-of ferocity. Burned to death, torn to pieces by wild beasts, their flesh pulled from their backs piecemeal by iron pincers, these men were true to their faith, and rejoiced that they were thought worthy thus to suffer and die. "The nearer I am to the sword," said Ignatius, "the nearer to God."† "Call us," said Tertullian, "*Sarmenticii* and *Semaxii*, names derived from the wood wherewith we are burned, and the stakes to which we are bound; this is the garment of our victory, our embroidered robe, our triumphal chariot."‡ The fury of Paganism was useless, for it was fighting against God. The Christian martyrs were firm in their faith. "They stood safe," says Cyprian, "stronger than their conquerors; the beaten and lacerated members conquering the beating and lacerating hooks."§ The obscure Galileans fought against the world—fought with no weapons of carnal warfare, but with the sword of truth—and won the victory. "Not by power nor by might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." The new religion tore down the Roman eagles that had for ages kept the world in awe, and replaced them by the Cross—once emblem of the most loathsome and abhorrent form of death—now the symbol of the highest civilization in the world. This Cross—once disgusting and repulsive beyond anything that can be conceived of to-day—has become more glorious than the laticlave on a senator's dress or the gems in the crown of a monarch. By what means has it come to be so prized and revered? The great Roman Empire crumbled to pieces before the power of the gospel. Christianity overcame all opposition; and the last Pagan Emperor, dying a premature death, exclaimed in accents of despair: "*Vicisti, Galilæe.*" "O Galilean, thou hast conquered."

We stop here to ask what was the secret of this marvellous success? What were the causes that conduced to effect such a tremendous revolution? In the history of the world there is nothing else like it. How, then, is it to be accounted for? Let the sceptic tell

* *Vide* Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, ii. ch. 6, 7.

† Ep. ad Smyrn, quoted by Farrar.

‡ Tertullian's *Apol.*

§ *Vide* Cave's *Prim. Christ.*

us. If Christianity had not a supernatural origin, then let us be informed of the natural causes which operated to call it into being and to impart to it such an unparalleled potency. Has any explanation been hazarded? Yes. Gibbon has given us five reasons, from a natural standpoint, for the early success of Christianity.* We will briefly examine them:

1. "The inflexible, and, if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses."

If there be any meaning in this, it is that the intense zeal of the early Christians was one of the great causes of the success of the doctrines they taught. We reply:

Nowhere else had zeal produced any such an effect. The world had seen plenty of examples of a fiery zeal that was unbending and intolerant, but never did such results as these follow in its train. And then again:

This very zeal itself has to be accounted for. How did it arise? From what cause did it spring? We know the state of despondency into which the Apostles fell on the death of their Master. All hope had fled, despair had taken possession of their souls, no way appeared to them by which the new kingdom could be established. Yet, shortly afterwards, these very men are found braving the most fierce and fiery persecution, going willingly to death for their faith, and manifesting a zeal such as the world was a stranger to. But the cause of this zeal is what the sceptic must explain.

2. "The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth."

To this I answer: That the doctrine of a future life was not new, having been taught previously by both Jews and Pagans. The people, therefore, to whom an appeal was made by the early Christians were perfectly familiar with it, and no such results as these had ever been known to arise out of it. And certainly the form in which it was presented by the early Christians was the most un-

* Decline and Fall, chap. xv.

likely to prove acceptable to men steeped in sensuality, as I have shown both Jews and Gentiles to have been at this time. A Mohammedan paradise might have proved attractive to such men ; assuredly the heaven of unsullied purity and holiness proclaimed by Jesus and His Apostles could not. Clearly, therefore, this reason is a most fallacious one, for the cause would have operated the other way.

3. "The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church."

It is not easy to understand very clearly what this means. Did the primitive Church possess miraculous powers? If this be conceded, then we allow that such powers had very much to do with the early promulgation of the religion that they were employed to support. But if it be meant that miraculous powers were ascribed to a Church that did not possess them, and that this conduced to its success, it is only saying in another form that its triumphs were due to imposture — assuredly a most inadequate and unlikely cause.

4. "The pure and austere morals of the Christians."

No doubt, but whence did these men obtain their perfect moral code, and how did it happen that such pure morality took hold of men in such a corrupt and sensual age? These are questions which the sceptic will find it difficult to answer.

5. "The union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an increasing and independent state in the heart of the Roman Empire."

This explains nothing whatever. For a long time must have elapsed before any such perfect discipline existed, and when it did it would be more likely to deter men from entering the Church than to attract them to its pale.

Gibbon's reasons for the rapid spread of Christianity in its early history may therefore be dismissed as totally inadequate. Like most infidel arguments, they are worth nothing.

Now take briefly the effects of Christianity upon the world at large in later years. To say that it completely revolutionized the thought of all the ages is to speak in very moderate terms of the results that flowed from Christianity. It reconstructed human nature. It completely changed humanity and directed its aims into a new channel. The author of a book considered by no means favourable to orthodox Christianity—*Ecce Homo*—remarks : " That

Christ's method, when rightly applied, is really of mighty force, may be shown by an argument which the severest censor of Christians will hardly refuse to admit. Compare the ancient with the modern world. 'Look on this picture and on that.' One broad distinction in the characters of men forces itself into prominence. Among all men of the ancient heathen world, there were scarcely one or two to whom we may venture to apply the epithet 'holy.' In other words, there were not more than one or two, if any, who, besides being virtuous in their actions, were possessed with an unaffected enthusiasm of goodness, and besides abstaining from vice, regarded even a vicious thought with horror. Probably no one will deny that in Christian countries this higher-toned goodness, which we call holiness, has existed. Few will maintain that it is exceedingly rare. Perhaps the truth is, that there has been scarcely a town in any Christian country since the time of Christ, where a century has passed without exhibiting a character of such elevation that his mere presence has shamed the bad and made the good better, and has been felt at times like the presence of God Himself. And if this be so, has Christ failed? or can Christianity die?"* The religion of Christ brought to the front unobtrusive virtues, which had never been heard of before, or which had been despised as effeminate and weak. *Humilitas* was to the heathen a fault to be condemned as only to be met with in connection with pusillanimity, and hence adapted to the condition of the slave, but utterly unworthy of a free man. With the Christian, humility became one of the most important of the graces, and the saintliest of virtues. Humanity, again, in the sense in which we use the term to-day, was entirely unknown to the heathen. With them *humanitas* meant human nature, or, in its very highest sense, refinement and culture; but Christianity infused into it all that relates to philanthropy and human brotherhood, and thus gave to the world the very broadest of all virtues, which even the sceptic to-day is proud to have ascribed him. "The very word humanity," says Max Müller, the greatest living authority upon language, "was unknown before Christianity." Love to God and love to man is the great fundamental doctrine of Christianity. All else is to be subservient to this divine law, the

* *Ecce Homo*, p. 71.

only one capable of regulating human conduct. This constitutes religion in its true sense, the rebinding of the soul to God from which it had broken loose, which is the literal meaning of the word.

Christianity produced its glorious effects not simply upon the individual but upon the race. It proved the regeneration of every soul that accepted it, and at the same time it became the Palingenesia of a lost world. Antiquity had never cared for man as man; human beings had been regarded only for their birth, wealth, beauty, or rank. But Christ came to teach love to man, apart altogether from adventitious circumstances, and thus to raise the fallen, elevate the lowly, and give comfort to the poor and oppressed. His religion was especially adapted to those who suffered and were afflicted. From the moment that the angelic carol resounded through the air, telling of the birth of the Christ at Bethlehem, the death-knell to tyranny and oppression was heard; and pity and compassion which philosophers had long regarded with aversion, were elevated into virtues of an exalted character. "For the first time," says Lecky, the historian of Rationalism, "the aureole of sanctity encircled the brow of sorrow and invested it with a mysterious charm.*

In domestic life the new religion produced such changes as had never been seen before, and of which the most sanguine could hardly have dreamed. Take marriage and the condition of woman. Not unfrequently do you hear persons to-day talking, in their ignorance, of Christianity proving an obstruction to the elevation of woman. The best way to refute them is to point them to the condition of woman before Christianity came. Nothing can be more clear than the fact that to the religion of Christ woman owes all that she has in the world worth calling her own. It was the Bible that first called her a "helpmeet" for man, and Christianity that gained for her true position. In the heathen world marriage was considered the least solemn of all contracts or engagements. "Women" says Mr. Blakey, "were considered in the Roman States as merely slaves; not as beings to humanize the temper and smooth down the natural asperities of life, but exclusively created

* History of Rat. ii. p. 266.

for low gratifications.”* By the Oppian law Roman women were restricted from riding in carriages and adorning themselves with certain articles of dress ; and amongst the Greeks the restrictions as to their appearing in public were carried much further. Romulus and Numa invested the husband with the same absolute power over his wife as over his children, with the exceptions that he could not sell her as a slave, and that if he died childless she became his heir. Dionysius Halicarnassus affirms that a woman could be put to death, not only for adultery, but for so simple an offence as excess in wine.† The consequence of these brutal enactments were, that refinement and all those delicate feelings which give to woman that peculiar charm were crushed out ; and dissimulation, intrigue, and perfidy became the distinguishing features of her character. The religion of Christ came and elevated woman to her true position, and showed her for the first time that she had rights of her own.

“ Yes ; a world of comfort
Lies in that one word—wife. After a bickering day,
To come with faded spirit home at night
And find the cheerful fire, the sweet repast,
At which, in dress of happy cheeks, and eyes,
Love sits, and smiling, lightens all the board.”‡

Only in the Christian institution of marriage is this really to be found. Certainly it was never realized in Paganism, nor in any of the great religions outside of Christianity. The family circle is essentially Christian. *Familia* meant in ancient times a multitude of corrupt and lazy slaves, kept in subjection by torture and the fear of death. It meant a despot at the head who could put his slaves to death when, from age or other causes, they were no longer of any use to him, and expose his children as soon as they were born ; matrons, without virtue or even modesty, who sacrificed the lives of their unborn infants from the most trifling causes ; and children, who, from their birth, were the victims of cruelty, and every kind of sin. Even Plato’s republic recognized a community of women, destruction of the family, and the exposure of children. Christianity made the family what it is to-day ; and all the sweet-

* Temp. Ben. of Christianity, p. 178.

† *Ibid.* p. 179.

‡ Knowles

ness and joy that is now associated with our English word "home" we owe to the religion of Jesus.

"Here woman reigns : the mother, daughter, wife,
 Strew with fresh flowers the narrow way of life,
 To the clear heaven of her delighted eye,
 An angel-guard of loves and graces lie ;
 Around her knees domestic duties meet,
 And fireside pleasures gambol at her feet.
 Where shall this land, this spot on earth be found ?
 Art thou a man ?—a patriot ? Look around—
 Oh, thou shalt find, howe'er thy footsteps roam,
 This land, thy country, and this spot thy home."

The position of woman became under Christianity what it had never been before, and there was suddenly called into being all that was pure, tender, and loving in association with the names of wife and mother. Such changes took place in this respect, and such nobleness of female character was the result, that a Pagan orator exclaimed with envy, "What women these Christians have !" *

The treatment of children was completely changed by Christianity. For under Roman law, just as the wife owed duties of a very strict character to the husband, whilst the husband owed none to the wife, so children were placed in terrible subjection to their parents, but the parents owed no sort of duty to their offspring. The power of the father over the life and liberty of his children was, amongst heathen nations, terrible to contemplate. In Roman law it is stated in the twelve tables prepared by the Decemvirs : "1st, That a father has the power of life and death over his legitimate children, and that he may sell them when he pleases ; and 2nd, That if a father has sold his son three times, then the son should be out of the father's power." In 1550 the ancient table of laws of Romulus was published at Lyons by a celebrated lawyer, named Baldwin, who observes in reference to this matter : "The lawgivers of the Romans gave full power, as one may say, to the father over his son, even during his whole life, whether he thought better to expel him his house, to whip him to death, to load him with chains, and in that condition to employ him in agriculture, or to put him

* *Vide* Chrys. ad Vid. Jun. ; Cave's Prim. Chris., ii. 5.

to death ; and this might be done even if his son were actually in the administration of the public affairs, invested with the greatest offices in the State, or distinguished by his zeal for the Commonwealth." * Christianity completely changed this fearful state of things. Its grand teaching was—"Children, obey your parents in the Lord."† Mark ! in the Lord, *i.e.*, in all that is in harmony with the gospel. And the parent was shown that there were duties devolving upon him, and which he was expected to perform towards his children. "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath ; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."‡ The early fathers of the Church condemned most vehemently the outrageous conduct of Roman parents towards their children ; and as Christianity progressed, a new and better state of things was brought about. In the year 200, Tertullian raised his voice against the cruelties of this character that abounded, and warned those who practised such iniquities that they might expect the wrath of Heaven to fall on them for their misdeeds. § Lactantius long afterwards showed great excitement at the atrocious barbarities that he was an eye-witness of in this respect, maintaining that it was contrary alike to Nature and Revelation that parents should have the power of life and death over their children. || The first Christian Cæsar, through the force of the newly-formed public opinion, made several enactments to remove the evils arising from bad legislation on the subject ; and even heathen emperors were compelled to modify the law under the increasing Christian influence. "Paganism," says Dr. Farrar, "had neglected children universally, had degraded them in myriads, had murdered them wholesale : Christ made them types of loving humility, and flung the desecrator of their innocence, with a millstone round his neck, into the sea."¶ Infants were despised, brutally treated, and cruelly murdered, in heathen times. Christ made them emblems of His kingdom in the heavens. This fact alone changed the whole current of thought with regard to them. Even to-day infanticide is fearfully prevalent throughout countries not blessed with the religion of Jesus. "Modern Philosophers," says the eloquent author just quoted,

* Blakey's Temp. Ben. of Christ, p. 193.

§ *Vide* Blakey's Temp. Ben. of Christ, p. 193.

† Eph. vi. 1.

|| *Ibid.*

‡ Eph. vi. 4.

¶ Witness of Hist., p. 172.

“from Voltaire down to the Comtists, are fond of pointing to China as an example of what civilization without Christianity can do. The Comte de Beauvoir (*Voy autour du Monde*), in one evening walk out at Canton, found seven abandoned babies, some purposely wounded, all blue, and dying of cold. The sisters of charity go out with a great basket, to save all they can: in one year they picked up 4000, most of them too far gone to be revived.”* Had the religion of Christ done nothing more than what it has accomplished in reference to the treatment of little children, it would still have proved itself an unparalleled blessing to the human race.

The treatment which the child undergoes will react with terrible force upon the man, for, as Wordsworth truly said, “The child is father of the man.” In Roman times brutality of every kind prevailed. The ancients cared nothing for man as man, but only respected him for the accidents of his position, such as wealth or power. Roman culture was in no sense humanitarian. The line of Terence—

“Homo sum ; humani nihil a me alienum puto”

was received in the theatre with loud and prolonged plaudits, but it took no hold on the heart. It was cheered by a multitude one day who the next would take their places in the amphitheatre and witness the brutal slaughter of a hundred strong men, as a holiday amusement. In these degrading and demoralizing gladiatorial shows, even the emperor would sit and receive the dying salutations of the victims as they turned to the throne and exclaimed, *Cæsar morituri te salutant*. The religion of Christ destroyed these base and brutal exhibitions, and raised on their ruins Institutions of Benevolence and Charity. The early fathers of the Church denounced, with all the vehemence they could command, these monstrous shows, and an obscure Monk—Telemachus—sacrificed his life in the cause, and by his death purchased the abolition of such heart-sickening spectacles. The amphitheatre fell into decay, and became a mass of ruins ; but under the magic wand of Christianity arose buildings far more glorious than the Colosseum, viz.,

* Witness of Hist., p. 172-3. Note.

the asylums, hospitals, orphanages, etc., which abound up to the present time in every land where Christianity has gone, and which are so peculiarly Christian that modern Freethought is as powerless as ancient heathenism was to call them into being. Well might Lecky, the Rationalist exclaim, "By the confession of all parties, the Christian religion was designed to be a religion of philanthropy; and love was represented as the distinctive test and characteristic of its members. As a matter of fact, it has probably done more to quicken the affection of mankind, to promote piety, to create a pure and merciful ideal, than any other influence that has ever acted on the world." *

The dignity of labour is much talked of to-day. When, think you, did labour first become dignified? I will tell you. It was when the Lord Jesus laboured and toiled at Nazareth, and taught His disciples that the poor were blessed above the rich, and when He chose his followers among the real workers, not the idlers, of life. Greeks and Romans spoke of artisans and labourers with contempt and scorn; but the early Christians never forgot that their Master had Himself chosen the position of an artisan, and that those who had been favoured with His personal teaching belonged to the working classes. Hence the early fathers preached the duty and dignity of labour. The proudest bishops were not ashamed to dig; and the hoe and the spade were regularly used by the early preachers of Christ's Gospel. "Work and worship" was the motto that Christians made their own, and honest labour was ennobled thereby. When men to-day talk of the dignity of labour, they should not forget that all the dignity that labour has won for it by Christianity.

Christianity gave a most important stimulus to education at a time when, and in lands where, gross ignorance prevailed. As soon as the new truths of this divine religion began to be promulgated, its beneficial influence upon the education of the people was felt. To it we are indebted for all the higher purifying influences upon philosophical research, and from it we have largely derived the arts of painting, statuary, music, and architecture. The German tribes that invaded the Roman Empire were utterly ignorant even of the

* Hist. of Rat., i. p. 358.

existence of a written language. But the first Bishops and Ministers of the Church carefully instructed them in all the necessary branches of education. The Bible was translated for their use, and they were taught to read its sacred pages. And so rapidly did education progress as it ran side by side with Christianity, that many persons were speedily enabled to compare the translation with the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew originals.* As we descend the stream of time we find the course of improvement steady and regular. From the reign of Clovis to Charlemagne, the course of improvement was great and marvellously rapid. This last monarch not only erected churches in every part of his extensive dominions, but schools and colleges were endowed by him on all hands for every class of the people. Thus was education provided for all classes free of charge. Mr. John Stuart Mill remarks: "That the clergy were the preservers of all letters and all culture, and the writings, and even the traditions of literary antiquity, is too evident to have ever been disputed. But for them there would have been a complete break in Western Europe between the ancient and modern world."† And standing, as I often have done, gazing with an amount of veneration which I can hardly express, so deep and intense is it, upon those grand old buildings which the ravages of time seem but to make more noble and magnificent, at Prague, Heidelberg, Bonn, Vienna, Tubingin, Jena, Leipsec, Gottingen, Berlin, Salamanca, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and some other places, I ask by whom were these monuments of the learning of the ages raised? By sceptics? Never a stone of them. They were all built by Christian men, actuated by Christian love for the intellectual advancement of their fellow-men. The great advantages which general literature has derived from Christianity are forcibly stated by Dr. Jortin. "To whom," he asks, "are we indebted for the knowledge of antiquities, sacred and secular, for everything that is called philology? To Christians. To whom for grammars and dictionaries of the learned languages? To Christians. To whom for chronology and the continuation of history through many centuries? To Christians. To whom for rational systems of morality and of natural religion? To Christians. To whom for improve-

* *Vide* Blakey's *Temp. Ben.* pp. 119-20.

† *Dissertations* ii. p. 154.

ments in natural philosophy, and for the application of these discoveries to religious purposes? To Christians. To whom for metaphysical researches carried as far as the subject will permit? To Christians. To whom for the moral rules to be observed by nations in war and peace? To Christians. To whom for jurisprudence and political knowledge, and for setting the rights of subjects, both civil and religious, upon a proper foundation? To Christians.”* This is so true that there will, I take it, be found no person who is acquainted with History who will have the temerity to call it in question.

The Church of Christ waged an incessant war against slavery, and continued it until that monstrous curse of humanity was swept away. In Rome, during Cicero’s time, there were about 2000 proprietors of 1,200,000 persons,† and in the entire Empire not less than 60,000,000 slaves.‡ From the first the condition of the slave was considerably improved by the influence of the new religion, and the dread horrors of slavery largely mitigated before it could be completely abolished. The conduct of the ancient Greeks and Romans towards their slaves was most outrageously barbarous and revolting. Flaminius, a Roman senator, put a great number of slaves to death, to gratify the curiosity of a friend who asked to see men die.§ The cruelties inflicted upon the helots called forth the just indignation of Plato and other distinguished philosophers. Yet even Plato did not condemn slavery itself, whilst Aristotle supported it, and Cicero put forth excuses in favour of its existence. The struggle of the Church with slavery in early times resulted in the establishment of four important principles of freedom, not the least of which was the right of slaves to marry in accordance with their own inclinations. “Religious charters of manumission are among the very first records of social freedom,”|| Says Mill: “In an age when the weak were prostrate at the feet of the strong, who was there but the Church to plead to the strong for the weak?”¶

The hardships inflicted upon slaves during Anglo-Saxon times in

* Quoted by Blakey, pp. 129-130.

† Cicero de Off., 11, 12.

‡ Le Maître Du Pape I, 233. Vide Farrar p. 176. Note.

§ Blakey, p. 169.

|| Blakey, p. 171.

¶ Dissertations II., p. 155.

our own country was wonderfully diminished by the power of the Church. Bishops were nominated special protectors of slaves, and not the least important of their duties consisted in shielding these poor oppressed victims from cruelties. In the end the great doctrine of human brotherhood proclaimed by Christ prevailed, and slavery was no more.

The religion of Christ reached the people at large, which ancient systems of philosophy had never done, and could not do ; and this was one of its special advantages. Neander says:—"The higher religious position, which necessarily supposed philosophical culture, could not be transferred to the multitude ; they seem as if excluded from the higher life, capable of religion only in the form of superstition. The great body of tradesmen and mechanics were considered as unsusceptible of the higher life. And in like manner it was remote from the aim of this new philosophy of religion to elevate the people to any higher stage of religious development, for which indeed it was destitute of the means. Plotinus distinguished two different stages—that of the noble-minded and that of the gross multitude. It was not till that word that went forth from the carpenter's shop had been published abroad by fishermen and tent-makers that those aristocratic notions of the ancient world could be overthrown." Jesus Christ has carried refinement and culture into the lowest walks of life, and shown how the very poorest can become cultured and gentle. He was Himself what Decker has described Him :

"The best of men

That ere wore earth about Him was a sufferer :

A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit—

The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

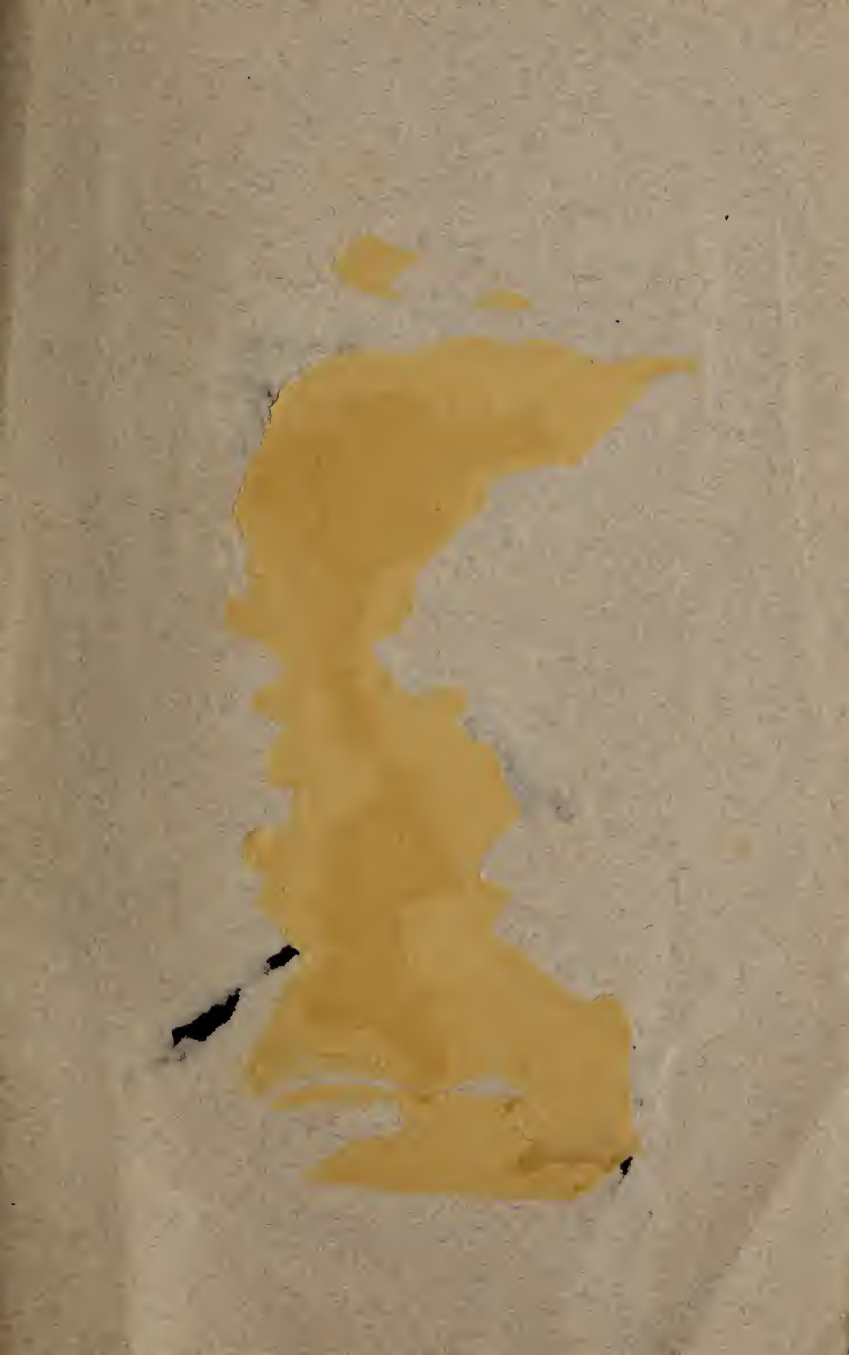
And this spirit was infused into His true followers.

Christianity is based upon love, and it is the only religion that has such a foundation. In this fact consists its universality, and herein lies its power. Love is the central governing principal of humanity, the principle that is possessed by all classes, all nations, all grades of men. Christianity is, moreover, able to take hold of humanity, and raise it up, thus acting as a vital force ; and it consequently not only stimulates the recipient to good deeds, but it

gives him the ability to perform them. It reaches the lowest, and is sufficient for the highest. It is adapted to the wants of universal man. "There is but one example," says Lecky,—his rationalism notwithstanding—"of a religion which is not naturally weakened by civilization, and that example is Christianity. In all cases the decay of dogmatic conceptions is tantamount to a complete annihilation of the religion, for although there may be imperishable elements of moral truth mingled with those conceptions, they have nothing distinctive or peculiar. The moral truths coalesce with new systems, the men who uttered them take their place with many others in the great pantheon of history, and the religion having discharged its functions, is spent and withered. But the great characteristic of Christianity, and the great moral proofs of its divinity, is that it has been the main source of the moral development of Europe, and that it has discharged this office not so much by the inculcation of a system of ethics, however pure, as by the assimilating and attractive influence of a perfect ideal. The moral progress of mankind never ceases to be distinctively and intensely Christian so long as it consists of a gradual approximation to the character of the Christian Founder. There is indeed nothing more wonderful in the history of the human race than the way in which that ideal has traversed the lapse of ages, acquiring a new strength and beauty with each advance of civilization, and infusing its beneficent influence in every sphere of thought and action." Christianity renders possible such characters as could not otherwise exist. It is the friend of progress, the basis of civilization, the advocate of personal holiness and purity, the support of those who suffer and are afflicted, the harbinger of good tidings to man, the only real satisfier of the spiritual wants of the race, and the sole source of our knowledge of God and the hereafter. The kingdom of Christ has been admirably described by the great Napoleon. "Alexander," he remarks, "Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself have founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this moment millions of men would die for him. I die before my time, and my body will be given back to earth, to become food for worms. Such is the fate of him who has been called the

great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and which is extended over the whole earth !” “ We live,” says an able modern author, “ in the midst of blessings, till we are utterly insensible of their greatness, and of the source from which they flow. We speak of our civilization, our arts, our freedom, our laws, and forget entirely how large a share of all is due to Christianity. Blot Christianity out of the page of man’s history and what would his laws have been ? What his civilization ? Christianity is mixed up with our very being, and our daily life ; there is not a familiar object around us which does not bear its mark, not a being or a thing which does not wear a different aspect because the light of Christian hope is on it, not a law which does not owe its truth and gentleness to Christianity, not a custom which cannot be traced in all its holy and healthful parts to the gospel ”* The truths of the religion of Jesus shall go on conquering, and to conquer until the stone cut out of the mountain without hands shall fill the whole earth, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ.

* Rose.



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Member of the Victoria Institute ; Philosophical Society of Great Britain ;
&c., &c., &c.*

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